



**Testimony
Bart Russell, Executive Director
Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the
GAE Committee
March 19, 2010**

RE: HB-5515, An Act Concerning Government Efficiency Through Regionalization in Connecticut

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) opposes **HB-5515 - An Act Concerning Government Efficiency Through Regionalization in Connecticut**, which provides for the regionalization of state and municipal services. As written, this would allow the newly appointed regional councils to have broad authority, including taxing authority.

We have heard a lot about “regionalism” and how it can provide more cost effective delivery of government services at the local level. However, in a recent presentation before the M.O.R.E. Commission, Economist Steve Lanza concluded that regionalizing municipal services is no silver bullet for achieving cost savings. We therefore oppose HB-5515, which mandates a regional approach and is in fact reminiscent of county government in Connecticut, which was not successful.

This measure calls for the creation of six “regional councils”. These new councils would create a huge new bureaucracy possibly resulting in the smaller member towns not having a strong voice in the process if a weighted provision is used to make decisions. In addition, allowing the regional councils to create regional property taxes is of major concern. Furthermore, the provision that these regional councils would essentially take over operation of local school districts is extremely disconcerting.

The bill states that these expanded services can be delivered in a cost effective fashion. We do not see how this can be achieved when the bill mandates these council employees be covered under terms of the contract negotiated between the State of Connecticut and the State Employees Bargaining Agent Coalition. State employee benefits are extremely rich particularly compared with those benefits offered in the private sector.

Local officials have been urging a collaborative model with the state providing incentives to encourage enhanced regionalization. None of these suggestions are found in the proposed bill. If enacted, this measure would cost towns more money and disrupt the many regional services that the towns have collectively worked so hard to develop. Therefore, we urge rejection of HB-5515.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment today.